

Lithuanians Say Kremlin Vows to Ease Sanctions

Soviets, Baltic Leaders Move Toward Talks on Independence

By David Remnick
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MOSCOW, June 13—Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene said today that the Kremlin will ease its economic sanctions against the republic and that both sides were headed toward the start of negotiations on how to resolve the Baltic secession crisis.

Following a meeting here today with Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, Prunskiene said that she had received assurances that Moscow would begin some deliveries of natural gas to factories in Lithuania. Moscow's seven-week-long embargo has shut down Lithuanian power plants and industries and has put tens of thousands of people out of work.

A Lithuanian spokesman said that Ryzhkov had agreed to increase natural gas supplies by 15 percent, bringing the republic up to about 30 percent of its usual supply. The Soviet news agency Tass said that supplies of some raw materials are also being restored, but a Lithuanian spokeswoman said she had no information on such deliveries.

Tass quoted Prunskiene as saying after meeting Ryzhkov, "We have no doubts the economic blockade will be lifted."

Prunskiene said that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's meeting Tuesday with the presidents of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia had been a success and that the two sides appear to have found a formula to begin negotiations.

The Kremlin for weeks had insisted that the three Baltic republics—forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940—repeal their declarations of independence, but they refused. In a speech to the Soviet legislature Tuesday, Gorbachev said that Lithuania merely

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must suspend the laws implementing the March 11 independence declaration for a dialogue to begin.

The three republics will probably suspend those laws during the period of negotiations with Moscow. Moscow would then lift the Lithuanian embargo entirely.

Tass quoted Ryzhkov as describing today's encounter with Prunskiene as "the beginning of a concrete dialogue on the question of future negotiations."

And Prunskiene, in an interview with Radio Moscow, said, "The Soviet government has begun to trust us more, and we have begun to trust it more. We have no doubt that it is ready to end the sanctions. This was said concretely, so we now have the chance to act and open contacts with the Soviet government."

Although Soviet law requires a period of up to five years before secession is allowed, Prunskiene told the Estonian media that she thought a negotiating period of about two or three months would be enough to work out the difficult problems of political authority and property. Ryzhkov said he thought the negotiating period would last two or three years.

President Bush told reporters in Washington that he applauded the "significant change" in Gorbachev's relations with the Baltic leaders. Bush said he hoped that Gorbachev's and Ryzhkov's meetings with the three Baltic presidents marked a "first step in a dialogue that will lead to the self-determination that we strongly support."

Radio Moscow said that Gorbachev did not attend today's meeting with Prunskiene because he was feeling unwell. Although there were no details available on Gorbachev's health, he looked exhausted during a speech in the Supreme Soviet Monday and paused repeatedly to cough.

Prunskiene, as well as the Baltic presidents, showed enthusiasm for Gorbachev's new plan to transform the country into a "union of

sovereign socialist states." The Baltic leaders, however, seemed not so much interested in joining permanently such a union but rather pleased that Gorbachev was serious about coping with the independence movements throughout the country.

During a meeting Tuesday of the Council of the Federation, an advisory cabinet that includes the presidents of all 15 Soviet republics, Gorbachev proposed a new state structure that he said would decentralize power and create a system of political and economic treaties and agreements between and among republics.

The independence movements in the Baltics and other republics, as well as the recent adoption of a decree on sovereignty in the Russian republic, appears to have forced Gorbachev to move more quickly.

"We used to talk about the renewal of the present union but now we are talking about a completely new union," said Gorbachev's press secretary, Arkady Maslennikov. "The situation is no longer like it was five years ago, or even one year ago. The pace of events has overtaken us."

A new treaty of the union, worked out on a "cooperative decision-making process," would make Moscow responsible mainly for the conduct of foreign policy, defense policy and some central financial functions.

At the meeting, Gorbachev and his longtime political rival, Boris Yeltsin, the president of the Russian republic, appeared to improve their personal relations and agreed on the need for such a new form of federation.

"We shook hands and we met each other halfway," a smiling Yeltsin told a session of the Russian parliament today. "We will be cooperating on a reciprocal, businesslike basis, and we agreed that Russia cannot exist without the entire country, and the country cannot exist without Russia." Yeltsin said he had no interest in the collapse of the union.

"Whether we call the new form a federation or a confederation is not



NIKOLAI RYZHKOV

... "beginning of a concrete dialogue"

important," he said. "The point is that it represents a democratization of our national relations."

The Russian legislature passed a declaration of sovereignty Tuesday and Yeltsin said the "absolute majority" said the Russian declaration was a kind of model for a new treaty of the union.

Gorbachev told the republican presidents that new relations with Moscow and other republics would depend "on the mutual interest of the parties involved" rather than on the unilateral demands of the Kremlin. Since 1922, the country has technically been a voluntary union of republics, but, as Maslennikov said, "this was not our reality."

Maslennikov called the new mood of compromise with the Baltic republics and the new enthusiasm in the Kremlin for a new treaty of the union "an olive branch, a huge step forward to meet the needs of the republics. This will be a different country."

A resolution of the Baltic republics' independence struggle also could lead to the U.S. Congress approving a trade pact signed during the Washington summit two weeks ago. Lawmakers have said they would not approve the pact unless Gorbachev opens negotiations and lifts the economic embargo against Lithuania.

The pact is important because it could clear the way for the United States to grant most-favored-nation trade status to the Soviet Union, a benefit that could help Gorbachev in his effort to improve the dismal state of the nation's economy.